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Lifting his head, Creakstar looked to the stars that hung in the sky. From where he sat, Thorntooth could see his eyes twinkle for a few heartbeats before his gaze moved to the crowd of cats below him.

"I say these words before , so that the spirits of our warrior ancestors may hear and approve of my choice. The new deputy of CanyonClan will be Thorntooth."

In an instant, the clan roared with approval. Thorntooth's heart raced in his chest as Creakstar's words rang in his head.

"Very well," Thorntooth dipped his head, "I shall do everything I can for this clan."

Dedication

To the people that gave me the power to make my ideas into reality.

Sydnie, mxrshywillow, seyriix and Artemis

C A N Y O N C L A N

L E A D E R **LIONSTAR**- pale ginger tom with green eyes

D E P U T Y **RUSSETSCORCH -** red-brown tabby tom with yellow eyes

M E D I C I N E C A T **SKYFLIGHT -** white she-cat with yellow eyes

APPRENTICE - YELLOWPAW

W A R R I O R S (toms and she-cats without kits)

SQUIRRELPELT- bright ginger-and-white she-cat with green eyes

APPRENTICE - BUMBLEPAW

BERRYSTEM - cream-and-white tom with blue eyes

BARKFALL - dark ginger tom with amber eyes

CAVECLAW - black-and-white tom with blue eyes

APPRENTICE - FLOWERPAW

OWLMIST - pale brown she-cat with green eyes

MOONSPLASH - silver, almost white she-cat with blue eyes

CLOUDSTORM - white tom with yellow eyes

APPRENTICE - SNAKEPAW

GRAVELPELT - brown tabby tom with amber eyes

TIGERBURR - large, dark brown tabby tom with amber eyes

BLACKCLAW - black tom with amber eyes

APPRENTICE - DOVEPAW

SNOWBLAZE - white she-cat with yellow eyes

GRAYTUFT- gray tabby tom with amber eyes

A P P R E N T I C E S (more than 6 moons old, in training to become Warriors)

BUMBLEPAW - ginger tom with yellow eyes

SNAKEPAW - golden tabby tom

FLOWERPAW - white she-cat with green eyes

DOVEPAW - cream she-cat with yellow eyes

YELLOWPAW - very light ginger tom with gold eyes

Q U E E N S (she-cats expecting or nursing kits)

GOLDENWING- golden tabby she-cat with green eyes

K I T S (former warriors and queens, now retired)

MORNINGKIT - ginger tortoiseshell she-kit
LEAFKIT - dark brown tom

MISTYKIT - pale light brown she-kit

THORNKIT - black-gray tom with green eyes

BLUEKIT - blue-gray she-kit with amber eyes

C A T S O U T S I D E C L A N S

ROSEMARY- gray-and-white she-cat with amber eyes

HONEY- honey-colored she-cat

ACORN- brown tom

RISHI- black tom

YETI- pure white tom with blind blue eyes

HAWTHORN- mottled gray tom with amber eyes

RIDGE- large golden tabby tom

WREN- gray she-cat with darker speckles

THYME- pale yellow she-cat with blue eyes

Prologue

It only took a heartbeat for the claws to rake along his throat. Oh, StarClan did it hurt, but he pushed through the pain to continue his attack. His claws dug into the white she-cat's pelt and almost immediately the smaller frame writhed under his grip as they wrestled to overpower the other.

His body ached, begging him to stop and get medical attention, but he just couldn't do it. Creakstar was out of commission, now it laid on his shoulders to win this battle! If he fell too, CanyonClan could fall!

"Why do you fight?" The she-cat screeched at him, "Your leader is dead!"

A rage flared in him, causing the black tom's jaws to snap at her throat to finish her. He quickly failed as another cat slammed into him, quickly pinning him to the ground before he had the chance to fight him off.

"Your hope of winning this battle is close to zero!" The she-cat hissed as she rose to her paws, standing proudly over him, blue eyes flashing with pride. "Your *clan* is finished. Hear that? *Finished!*"

"Who says?" Thorntooth growled, green eyes flashing with defiance. "StarClan?"

Stunned, the she-cat blinked at him, her mouth agape as she tried to find the words.

"Because *I* said so!" she declared. "This was supposed to be *my* land!"

Thorntooth's claws flexed, his eyes darting from the tom that was pinning him and to the white she-cat, trying to find a way to get out, though he could feel his body shutting down from the wounds he had been inflicted with.

"*You're* dead," Thorntooth uttered.

That was the wrong thing to say. Claws dug into his throat, the black tom writhed, attempting to twist his body to throw off his attacker. Thorntooth snapped his jaws at the tom, but this time, the white she-cat joined in to batter the deputy.

With the sudden attacks, desperation settled in. Thorntooth thrashed about, his claws lashing out blindly at the two cats, but to no avail.

Oh, StarClan! But he couldn't think, he had to fight! For CanyonClan!

Then his body went limp. Panic settled in, as he could no longer move. The attacks stopped, followed by snarky laughs.

"Well, well," the she-cat meowed, "Looks like CanyonClan is *finally* finished. WispClan couldn't do it, but *I* did what they-"

Her monologue was cut short as a tan tom crashed into her. Thorntooth attempted to strain his head to see who had come to help, but his vision was quickly failing.

"What- You're supposed to be *dead*!"

"StarClan granted me lives!"

Creakstar? Hope filled his chest. CanyonClan was not doomed.

Oh, Tigerstar. Are you proud of him?

The name brought a surge of emotions. *Tigerstar,* the cat that had captured his attention from the very moment Thorntooth met him. The former CanyonClan leader meant so much to the black tom.

Thorntooth's ears perked when he heard yowls of triumph. It sounded like CanyonClan had won this battle. Thornooth's heart lifted.

"Thorntooth!" His name was called, quickly realizing that it was Creakstar that was calling him.

"Yellowriddle is coming, hang in there," Creakstar meowed, "We'll get you patched up."

It warmed his heart to hear that Creakstar was hopeful, but Thorntooth could already tell that he would not make it.

"You did it," Thorntooth coughed as he spoke, "Tigerstar would be proud."

He felt Creakstar pushing something against his throat and the other injuries. Thorntooth let out a weak purr for the effort.

"I'm glad we were able to win this battle," Thorntooth admitted, his breathing becoming ragged, "Maybe StarClan will be kind..."

"Don't say that!" Creakstar's voice trembled, "Look, I'm about to stop the bleeding! Yellowriddle is almost here!"

Thorntooth knew that tremble in the younger cat's voice.

"You're an outstanding leader, Creakstar, but you're a terrible liar," Thorntooth let out a weak, ragged laugh. "I'm going to see my good friend again. I will tell him that his son is doing just fine."

"Wait-! You can't go!" Creakstar wailed, "You can't see him just yet-"

Creakstar's voice faded away as Thorntooth finally allowed his body to rest. For a moment, there was nothing, then it felt as if he was being lifted up. He opened his eyes, finding himself almost hovering above his body. Creakstar was now crouched, his face seemingly buried in the black fur. Yellowriddle had made it, but it was too late. The yellow tom was at the leader's side, his tail draped over the tom's shoulders.

His heart sank with grief when he saw his sister, Bluespring, race over through the trees, paws skidding to a halt next to his body. The blue-gray she-cat immediately dropped at his side, a heart wrenching wail escaping her. Snaketail appeared at her side, his tail draped over her, his head brushing against hers.

The black tom could see many of his clanmates move around his body, Graytuft, Morningdew, his most recent apprentice, Pinenose

and Flowerpelt. Thorntooth could see the sad look in Flowerpelt's eyes as the white she-cat settled beside the black tom's body. She and the others were staring tongues with him.

Guilt pierced his heart. He didn't know how much he meant to CanyonClan, or how much he meant to Flowerpelt, until now. He hung his head in shame, feeling guilty for letting himself go.

I could've fought. He thought bitterly. *But my wounds were too great. Even if Yellowriddle was here from the very beginning...*

"Thorntooth."

Hearing his name, the deputy's thoughts vanished as he turned his head to see his father, Barkfall. The once old tom looked moons younger. He had a loving look in his eyes as he moved to touch noses with his son.

"Come," he meowed, "It's time to go. Everyone is waiting for you. *Tigerstar* is waiting to see you."

Tigerstar. The cat he followed for all those years, the cat he devoted his life to, he could finally see him. Almost instantly, the guilt of leaving his clan left. He then moved to follow Barkfall.

Mistypaw! His heart soared as he realized could finally see her again. *Silverstalk!* He can finally meet her!

As he and Barkfall padded into a star-covered field, the dark tom looked around as cats began to crowd around him, greeting him. Mistypaw's familiar pelt appeared and the tom immediately pressed his muzzle against her.

"Good to see you again," Mistypaw mewed, her eyes full of emotion.

"I missed you, too," He told her. "So much has happened..."

"I know," she purred, taking a few steps back, before beckoning him with her tail. "Someone has been waiting a long time to meet you."

Blinking, Thorntooth turned his head, quickly setting his eyes on a long-furred, blue-gray she-cat. For a moment, he wondered how

Bluespring was able to join StarClan, but he quickly realized that this she-cat was Silverstalk. A strange emotion erupted in his heart.

That's my... His thoughts never finished as a flash of a dark brown pelt, causing his eyes to move to another familiar cat. His heart soared as he noticed Tigerstar sitting patiently, a warm look in his eyes. Thorntooth's paws itched to run to the other tom, but he managed to hold himself together as he moved to greet Silverstalk.

Tigerstar, my love, I'm coming. I can be at your side once more.

Chapter One

"Bluekit, wait-"

Thornkit's words fell on deaf ears as the blue-gray she-kit moved towards the leader's highrock. His sister was planning on climbing the rock.

She's going to fall! Thornkit fretted as the black tom slinked behind.

"Lionstar will find out," Thornkit mewed to his sister, his eyes darting to and from everywhere in the camp.

"When I get up there, then he will," Bluekit cheekily replied, her amber eyes eyeing him.

Thornkit didn't understand what she was trying to prove. "Don't-"

He didn't even finish as Bluekit immediately climbed the smaller boulders at the base of the highrock. He watched her struggle, his paws trembling and his heart racing in fear that his sister would fall. His worry grew too great when he spotted a slight slip and he whipped head around the camp. Russetscorch was the first cat he saw.

"Bluekit is climbing the highrock!" He called out to the deputy, who turned his head to the kit.

Guilt washed over him as he could hear Bluekit complaining that he tattled. He cared for his sister's safety!

Russetscorch was quick to come over, the tom quickly scaling the rock in mere seconds to grab the she-kit's scruff, then turning to head back down.

"I told you that you shouldn't climb," Thornkit mewed to his sister when she was placed on the ground. "You slipped!"

"I did not!" Bluekit snapped, her fur bristling. "I had it under control!"

"Now, now," Russetscorch meowed, his amber eyes softening as he looked between the kits. "Thornkit is looking out for you. You should be grateful."

"But-"

Russetscorch's tail quickly moved to shush her. "You shouldn't be climbing, anyway. That rock is for Lionstar and the deputy, which is me."

Bluekit looked as if she wanted to argue, but quickly thought that she shouldn't. Russetscorch let out a purr.

"If you fell, Barkfall would be worried!" Russetscorch told her, "You don't want to worry him, do you?"

Bluekit's face twisted with frustration. "Why would he bother? It's not like he visits us."

Thorntooth felt his heart sink. His sister was right. He couldn't remember the last time Barkfall visited. Lionstar has been more of a father.

"He still cares," Russetscorch meowed, his voice laced with a mixed emotion, "I'm sure of it."

Bluekit didn't seem convinced. The deputy opened his mouth to continue, but from across the camp, his name was called. Russetscorch then turned his head. Thornkit looked as well, quickly spotting Squirrelpelt and Bumblepaw. The ginger warrior held a strange look, and the deputy was quick to say goodbye to the kits before heading off towards the other warrior.

Thornkit watched him go before looking at his sister. She seemed down.

"Hey," Thornkit mewed, "I'm sorry-"

"It's okay," Bluekit responded, her eyes flashing with sadness. "I

would like to rest now."

"Oh," Thornkit watched his sister move towards the nursery. "Okay... Rest well."

Grief pierced his heart. He hated when his sister's spirit was down. Though, he shakes the feeling off to try and feel better. The kit looked around the camp, quickly realizing that there was nothing to do.

I'm old enough to be an apprentice, right? He thinks. His eyes moved to the small group of cats that were gathered near the highrock. He spotted his father's dark pelt. He was speaking with Lionstar, Russetscorch and Goldenwing.

Are they talking about us? He wondered, hoping they were. Becoming an apprentice was exciting! He's been waiting for so long, so long that he thought Lionstar didn't remember. Serving his clan was the ultimate test of loyalty, or so Goldenwing says. But the black tom believed her.

"A warrior does his duties with diligence. Make sure your hard work is recognized, perhaps you'll turn some eyes."

Turn some eyes. Thornkit held those words close to his heart. He didn't know what she meant, but it had to mean something good!

A burst of energy flashed through him and the excited kit raced off towards the nursery. He hoped Mistykit, Morningkit and Leafkit were there so he could tell them the good news! His three foster siblings were roughly a moon younger, but they would become apprentices soon.

As he entered the nursery, Morningkit and Leafkit turned their heads towards him. In the back of the den, he could see Mistykit sharing a nest with Bluekit. Thornkit could almost feel his sister's sadness.

"Something's happened," Leafkit mewed, his head tilting oddly.

Morningkit blinked, her amber eyes twinkling with interest. He saw Bluekit's ears twitch, showing him she was listening.

"I saw Lionstar speaking with-," Thornkit paused for a heartbeat, "Barkfall. I think we're going to become apprentices soon."

"Apprentices?" Bluekit questioned.

"We're old enough," Thornkit meowed.

"Agh, we'll have to wait," Mistykit complained. "I want to be an apprentice now!"

"What's so great about being an apprentice?" Leafkit questioned, "Nothing really changes."

"What do you mean?" Morningkit asked. "We can go out and explore the territory!"

Thornkit opened his mouth to say something, to tell her to stop, but Leafkit beat him to it.

"*You* can explore the territory," the brown tom corrected. "Lionstar will keep me in camp."

"That's not true!" Mistykit mewed, the she-kit leaving Bluekit's side and padding up to her brother. "Lionstar will give you a place here! I'm sure of it!"

As the siblings argued, Thornkit looked back to where he saw the leader and Backfall. Lionstar and Goldenwing were speaking with each other. The black kit shifted, deciding on whether to leave the nursery and question the two.

Leafkit should be able to become a warrior! The kit thought, *He's a part of the clan!*

Thornkit sighed, moving to where his sister was, and slipped into the nest with her.

"Do you think Leafkit will become an apprentice?" Bluekit whispered to him as he settled.

Her voice was laced with worry. Worry filled Thornkit's heart as he watched the siblings. He looked back at his sister, her eyes latched

onto his.

"He has to," Thornkit mewed.

He has to.

Yawning, Thornkit moved out of the nursery. The crisp morning air ruffled the black tom's fur, and he shivered. Beside him, Goldenwing came out after him, the golden tabby's pelt immediately catching the light of the sun. Thornkit squinted his eyes at the light.

It had been a few days since Thornkit saw Barkfall and Lionstar speaking with one another. He had thought that they were speaking about him and Bluekit, but he felt nothing but disappointment every day that his or Bluekit's name was not called.

"Hey, Goldenwing."

The tabby she-cat stopped, her head turning to look at him. "Yes?"

"When will I become an apprentice? And Bluekit?"

He watched as Goldenwing's eyes flashed with sympathy, but she let out a purr.

"Don't worry," she meowed, "Lionstar knows that you're supposed to become apprentices."

Frustration flared within him, and his eyes narrowed.

"Then..." He hesitated to continue, "Why aren't we apprentices?"

Goldenwing glanced towards the highrock, "Lionstar has much on his mind. I will speak to him when I get the chance, okay?"

He stared at her for a few heartbeats, before he nodded. *See if that helps, I suppose.*

Thornkit watched as the golden queen moved towards the leader's den. He sighed, his mind racing. He *wanted* to be an apprentice. He is now over six moons old!

What was making Lionstar take so long? Thornkit flexed his claws, impatience rippling through his pelt.

His thoughts were interrupted when a mottled pelt zipped by. Thornkit blinked as he looked over, quickly realizing that Morningkit, Mistykit and Leafkit were leaving the nursery.

What are they doing? He wondered, watching the siblings as they were slinking towards the entrance of the camp. Immediately, he knew that they were going.

"You shouldn't leave," Thornkit mewed to Morningkit as he moved towards them.

Mousebrains! Thornkit didn't like to think badly of his foster siblings, but what were they thinking? So many things could go wrong!

The tortoiseshell looked at him, her amber eyes full of pride.

"We're going to prove that Leafkit can become a warrior!" She declared, her fur standing on end.

What? Thornkit blinked. *Surely they can't be serious...*

"You can prove it some other way, can't you?" He asked.

Mistykit stopped, her tail on Leafkit's shoulder. The brown tom turned to him, his eyes questioning.

"What do you suggest?" Leafkit asked.

As Thornkit opened his mouth to respond, nothing came out, finding that he didn't actually know what he was going to say.

Mistykit narrowed her eyes, "Got nothing?"

Thornkit felt guilty for suggesting nothing to help them and he looked at his paws in shame.

"Well..." Thornkit mewed, "I'll come with you. I don't want anything to happen to you guys."

Morningkit's eyes softened as Thornkit spoke.

"Okay," she meowed, "Come then."

Thornkit watched as the siblings padded towards the camp's entrance, his heart racing. He didn't know what to expect. Anything could happen. Thornkit has heard Caveclaw and Cloudstorm saying that there were foxes and kittypets roaming the forest.

Recently too! He shook his pelt to get rid of his anxiety.

He didn't like that they were sneaking around, breaking the rules just to prove something.

It's for Leafkit. He told himself. *I can help Leafkit become an apprentice!*

Determination filled his body as he was quick to follow after.

Chapter Two

"Where shall we go?"

"No idea. Wherever there's prey, I suppose."

Hiding in the undergrowth, fear prickled along Thornkit's fur. Beside him in the crowded space were his foster siblings. He could feel Mistykit's tense body as her eyes watched as the paws from other CanyonClan cats were mere fox-lengths away.

"Then near the StreamClan border?" Thornkit recognized Gravelpelt's voice. "There seems to be lots of birds gathering there."

"Sure," the other cat, Cloudstorm, answered. "You ready to put those hunting crouches to the test, Snakepaw?"

"Yes!" Snakepaw's voice was quick to reply.

Jealousy flared within Thornkit as he could almost taste the eagerness in the apprentice's voice.

The black tom listened as the cats padded away. Beside him, Mistypaw shifted, her eyes meeting his.

"Can we leave now?" She whispered in question.

"I think we should be fine," Morningkit added.

Thornkit's fur grew hot as his foster siblings looked at him with a look of anticipation in their eyes.

They're looking to me for instructions... Thornkit couldn't put a paw on the feeling he had rising. Was it pride?

The kit angled his ears, listening for any pawsteps from the small patrol returning, but he heard nothing. He turned to the siblings and nodded to them. One by one, the kits filed out of the undergrowth they were hiding in. Once they were all out in the

faded path, Thornkit looked to the towering oak trees with awe. He hadn't had the time to take in the scenery as they had to hide the moment they left the camp.

So tall! Thornkit had a feeling that Bluekit would already be halfway up the trunk if she were here.

Oh, Bluekit. His heart raced as he wondered if his sister was up. Was she panicking? Or was she playing pranks on the apprentices and didn't know that they were gone? Thornkit's fur prickled with anxiety.

"So here's the plan," Mistypaw's voice brought him back to the present, "Leafkit will catch something- Oh, maybe a bird!"

"That's too hard," Leafkit commented.

"He's right,"Morningkit agreed, "Maybe something... easier?"

"A mouse will do," Thornkit chimed in, "They're dumb."

Mistykit looked at him, her green eyes speculating. Thornkit's fur raised as Mistykit's mouth opened to question him.

"That's what Snakepaw told me!" Thornkit quickly mewed, his fur standing on end in defense.

Mistykit gave a sigh and then looked at Leafkit, "Does that sound good?"

"Yeah," Leafkit answered, "First we need to find the mice."

At once, they all lifted their muzzles, drinking in the scents of the forest. Thornkit could smell the familiar scent of mouse, but in respect for Leafkit, he wanted his foster sibling to announce it.

Leafkit perked up, his ears twitching as he turned his head. "I can smell one!"

Thornkit's heart swelled at Leafkit's excitement as the brown tom rarely showed this type of emotion.

"Then lets track it," Morningkit mewed, the tortoiseshell moving to guide her brother.

Thornkit stepped back to let Morningkit and Leafkit take the lead. Mistykit glanced at Thornkit, her gaze warm.

"Thank you," Mistykit mewed, "Leafkit won't say it, but he's thankful as well."

Thornkit's heart raced as he watched her pad after her siblings. The black kit felt proud of himself, if that were true.

For Leafkit. He reminded himself. *There's no need to feel proud of* yourself.

Shaking his pelt, Thornkit quickly scrambled to catch up with his foster siblings.